

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS
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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT ECON ELAB SOPN MP PGOV EAID CH IN ETRN
SUBJECT: MAURITIUS WEEKLY REVIEW - AUGUST 26

REF: PORT LOUIS 875 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY. PORT LOUIS 0910 (NOTAL) PROVIDES A
SUMMARY OF THIS CABLE. END SUMMARY

1. THE PRIVATE SECTOR, WHICH LAST APRIL COMMISSIONED
A PUBLIC OPINION POLL BY THE FRENCH FIRM SOFRES ON
THE ATTITUDES OF MAURITIANS IN THE POLITICAL AND
ECONOMIC DOMAINS, REVEALED HALF OF THE RESULTS
AT A PRESS CONFERENCE ON AUGUST 19. SPEAKING FOR
THE POLL'S SPONSORS, MAURICE PATERAU OF THE JOINT
ECONOMIC COMMITTEE SAID THE OTHER HALF OF THE QUESTIONS
MUST BE STUDIED FURTHER, WHICH NATURALLY AND IMMEDIATELY
GAVE RISE TO THE SUSPICION, ESPECIALLY BY THE MAURITIAN
MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM), THAT ONLY THE HALF FAVORABLE
TO THE POSITION AND PROSPECTS OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND
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THE POLITICAL FORCES IT SUPPORTS WERE GIVEN THE LIGHT OF
DAY.

2. A 67 PERCENT MAJORITY OF THE POLL RESPONDENTS WERE
SATISFIED WITH THEIR MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF LIFE, BUT 40
PERCENT SAID THEY LACKED THE ESSENTIALS FOR LIVING.
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT IS WELCOMED BY MAURITIANS, AS IT

CREATES JOBS, AND THE FREE ZONE IS CONSIDERED A SUCCESS. PARTICIPATION BY WORKERS IN THE OWNERSHIP OF THE ENTERPRISES IN WHICH THEY WORK IS CONSIDERED MORE IMPORTANT THAN PARTICIPATION IN MANAGEMENT OR THE BENEFITS OF THE ENTERPRISE. THE MAJORITY PREFER SOCIALISM ALONG WITH A MIXED ECONOMY AND MASSIVELY REJECT COMMUNISM (54 PERCENT BELIEVE IN SOCIALISM, 31 PERCENT IN "LIBERALISM", 17 PERCENT IN CAPITALISM AND ONLY 7 PERCENT IN COMMUNISM).

3. MAURITIANS ARE GENERALLY SYMPATHETIC TO THE WESTERN COUNTRIES, FROM WHICH THEY WELCOME FOREIGN AID, WHICH IS CONSIDERED A NECESSITY. FAVORABLE ATTITUDES TOWARD THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES WERE HELD BY THE PERCENTAGES NOTED: UK - 73 PERCENT; FRANCE -69; INDIA -59; U.S. - 56; MADAGASCAR - 37; CHINA - 34; USSR - 27. EMIGRATION IS CONSIDERED A GOOD OPTION BY HALF THE POPULATION, PARTICULARLY BY THE YOUNG (AND 75 PERCENT OF MAURITIANS WOULD LIKE TO SEE THEIR CHILDREN EMIGRATE, WHICH SHOWS A CERTAIN LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY).

4. A MAJORITY WANT "PROGRESSIVE" CHANGE AND OPPOSE "REVOLUTIONARY" CHANGE. (27 PERCENT WANT "RADICAL" CHANGE IN MAURITIUS, 15 LIKE THINGS AS THEY ARE, AND 54 PERCENT FAVOR "REFORMS"). THIRTY PERCENT WANT A NEW GOVERNMENT TO TAKE POWER. STRIKES ARE CONSIDERED SOMETHING TO BE USED ONLY AS A LAST RESORT. THE PERFORMANCE OF THE

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GOVERNMENT SINCE INDEPENDENCE IS GENERALLY FAVORABLY VIEWED AND A MAJORITY OF 59 PERCENT HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE LABOR PARTY. THE PUBLIC'S BIGGEST COMPLAINT IS OVER PUBLIC TRANSPORT, FOLLOWED BY EDUCATION, HOUSING AND INFLATION. ONLY HALF THE POPULACE ATTENDED POLITICAL RALLIES LAST DECEMBER BUT THREE-FOURTHS FOLLOWED THE CAMPAIGN OVER THE RADIO AND TV. MORE THAN HALF THE POPULATION READS THE DAILY NEWSPAPERS.

5. THE PRIVATE SECTOR CONCLUDED FROM THE POLL THAT THE MAURITIAN POPULATION IS INTELLECTUALLY ALERT AND MUCH CLOSER IN ATTITUDES TO THE PEOPLE OF THE INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES THAN TO THOSE OF THIRD WORLD AFRICAN COUNTRIES. PATURAU ADMITTED THAT ONE OF THE UNPUBLISHED RESULTS SHOWED A LARGE MAJORITY IN FAVOR OF "NATIONALIZATION" BUT INSISTED THIS WAS MISLEADING BECAUSE THE ANSWERS WERE AFFECTED BY THE WAY THE QUESTIONS IN THIS AREA WERE PHRASED. PATURAU CLAIMED A MAJORITY ALSO SPOKE FAVORABLY OF THE PRIVATE BUSINESS SECTOR.

6. LE MILITANT, ORGAN OF THE MMM, ACCUSED THE PRIVATE SECTOR OF HAVING MANIPULATED THE RESULTS OF THE POLL BY

PUBLISHING ONLY WHAT WAS FAVORABLE TO ITSELF AND TO THE LABOR PARTY, WHILE SUPPRESSING ALL RESULTS INDICATING ANYTHING GOOD ABOUT THE MMM AND THE IDEAS IT ADVOCATES. THE PAPER CONCLUDED THAT THE REALLY SIGNIFICANT THING IN THIS WAS THAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR HAS ABANDONED THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PMSD), WHICH WAS NEVER MENTIONED, AND HAS TIED ITS FUTURE TO THE LABOR PARTY, WHICH ITS PARTIAL POLL RESULTS EXTOLL. THE MMM PAPER THEN PROCEEDED TO PUBLISH SOME OF THE RESULTS KEPT CONFIDENTIAL BY THE POOL SPONSORS, FROM A TEXT IT HAD OBTAINED OF THE FULL RESULTS. THESE SHOWED THAT 90 PERCENT OF MAURITIANS WANT MORE GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION IN THE ECONOMY, WHILE 59 PERCENT FAVOR NATIONALIZATION OF SUGAR FACTORIES, TRANSPORT AND HOTELS (WITH ONLY 17 PERCENT OPPOSING). TWO-THIRDS CONFIDENTIAL

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OF MAURITIANS FAVOR MAKING CREOLE AN OFFICIAL LANGUAGE ALONGSIDE ENGLISH AND FRENCH (A POSITION ADVOCATED BY THE MMM).

7. THE UNPUBLISHED POLL RESULTS ALSO SHOWED THAT THE MMM VOTERS ARE MAINLY YOUNG, WORKERS, LEFTIST, DEDICATED TO THE PARTY, DRAWN FROM ALL COMMUNITIES AND FROM BOTH URBAN AND RURAL SECTORS (IN CONTRAST TO THE OTHER TWO MAIN PARTIES, WHICH ARE MUCH MORE COMMUNALLY BASED). FURTHERMORE, THE POLL CONCLUDED THAT THERE IS A MOMENTUM FAVORING THE

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MMM, ITS STRENGTH WITH YOUTH BODES WELL FOR ITS FUTURE SUCCESS, THE TIDE IS RUNNING IN ITS FAVOR, AND ON THE EVE OF THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS A MAJORITY OF VOTERS THOUGHT THE MMM WOULD WIN THEM. IF NEW GENERAL ELECTIONS ARE HELD, 45 PERCENT EXPECT THE MMM TO WIN THEM, WHILE ONLY 29 PERCENT EXPECT THE GOVERNING COALITION TO TRIUMPH. A MAJORITY BELIEVE THE MMM IS CAPABLE OF GOVERNING THE COUNTRY AND ONLY A SMALL MINORITY ARE "AFRAID" OF THE MMM COMING TO POWER.

8. PATRAU, SPEAKING FOR THE POLL SPONSORS, ACCUSED THE MMM OF AN ACT OF "ESPIONAGE." THE PRO-GOVERNMENT PRESS CHALLENGED LE MILITANT TO PUBLISH OTHER PARTS OF THE POLL RESULTS WHICH THEY SAY WOULD SHOW THAT THE MAURITIAN PUBLIC LACKS CONFIDENCE IN THE MMM. MMM SECRETARY GENERAL PAUL BERENGER MET THE CHALLENGE ON AUGUST 25, WHEN HE RELEASED TO THE PRESS THE TEXT OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR'S "PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS" DRAWN FROM THE POLL. THESE SHOWED THAT A MAJORITY OF THE MAURITIAN POPULACE HAS A FAVORABLE

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VIEW OF THE MMM AND ITS LEADERS. SURPRISINGLY, THEY ALSO INDICATED THAT GAETAN DUVAL OF THE PMSD REMAINS VERY POPULAR AND IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN MAURITIAN POLITICS. BERENGER FURTHER REVEALED THAT A QUESTION GAUGING THE POPULARITY OF VARIOUS POLITICAL FIGURES RANKED PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM IN FIRST PLACE WITH AN 82 PERCENT FAVORABLE IMAGE, BERENGER HIMSELF SECOND WITH 64 PERCENT, FOLLOWED BY RINGADOO (63), DUVAL (55) AND BOOLELL (50). IN HIS REMARKS BERENGER WARNED THAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR APPEARS TO BE SEEKING A CONFRONTATION WITH THE MMM AND THE TRADE UNIONS. HE PREDICTED THAT THE COUNTRY IS HEADED FOR A "JAMAICAN SITUATION", WITH TWO POLITICAL PARTIES, A RIGHT (LABOR) AND A LEFT (THE MMM), FIGHTING IT OUT FOR SUPREMACY.

9. ALTHOUGH THERE HAS BEEN NO OFFICIAL CONFIRMATION, THE PRESS HAS BEEN REPORTING THAT THE SELECT COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (REFTEL) HAS REACHED AGREEMENT TO RECOMMEND AN ADDITIONAL ONE PERCENT WAGE INCREASE ON TOP OF THE WAGE SCHEDULE PROPOSED EARLIER BY THE GOVERNMENT. IF TRUE THIS WOULD APPEAR TO BE A GENUINE COMPROMISE, WITH THE UNIONS WINNING A LARGER INCREASE BUT THE GOVERNMENT HOLDING THE LINE BELOW WHAT IT CONSIDERS INFLATIONARY. THOUGH THE

SELECT COMMITTEE IS SWORN TO SECRECY UNTIL IT MAKES ITS REPORT TO THE ASSEMBLY ON AUGUST 30, LE MILITANT OF AUGUST 26 ANNOUNCED THAT THE COMMITTEE'S REPORT WILL BE UNANIMOUS AND WILL "GIVE ENTIRE SATISFACTION TO THE NATIONAL TRADE UNION FRONT". THIS SOUNDS MORE LIKE A GOVERNMENT CAPITULATION ON THE WAGE INCREASE ISSUE.

10. ON HIS RETURN FROM TWO WEEKS SPENT IN CHINA, PLANNING MINISTER GHURBURRUN TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT HAD REAFFIRMED ITS WILLINGNESS TO ASSIST IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW AIRPORT IN THE NORTH. THE

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CHINESE FINANCIAL COMMITMENT REMAINS AT 175 MILLION RUPEES, BUT SINCE THE ORIGINAL AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED IN 1972 THE EXPECTED COST OF THE PROJECT HAS RISEN TO 500 MILLION RUPEES. THIS MEANS THAT THE CHINESE MONEY WILL NOW BUILD THE TERMINAL ONLY. THE MINISTER SAID THAT FINANCING FROM FOREIGN AID DONORS (FRANCE AND GERMANY WERE MENTIONED), INTERNATIONAL LENDING AGENCIES AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR WILL BE SOUGHT FOR THE RUNWAYS, THE ROAD FROM THE AIRPORT TO PORT LOUIS, ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT AND OTHER COSTS OF THE PROJECT. HE SAID WORK WOULD START NEXT YEAR AND THE PROJECT WOULD BE COMPLETED IN 1982. (COMMENT: THE CHINESE HAVE RE-CONFIRMED THEIR EARLIER COMMITMENT, BUT THEY ARE OBVIOUSLY UNWILLING TO PUT UP MORE CASH. THE HEAD OF AIR MAURITIUS, WHO WAS A MEMBER OF GHURBURRUN'S DELEGATION, TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT THE ACTUAL COST OF THE PROJECT (INCLUDING THE ELECTRONICS) IS ESTIMATED AT BE 600 MILLION RUPEES, RATHER THAN 500 MILLION, AND THIS DOES NOT ENCOMPASS THE ROAD TO PORT LOUIS. NO ONE SEEKS TO BE QUESTIONING WHETHER MAURITIUS REALLY NEEDS A NEW, "ULTRA-MODERN" INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. END COMMENT.)

11. THE PRESS REPORTS THE GOVERNMENT IS PLANNING A REFERENDUM IN NOVEMBER ON MAKING MAURITIUS A REPUBLIC. THE LABOR PARTY WILL NOT CAMPAIGN ON EITHER SIDE OF THE ISSUE, THOUGH RAMGOOLAM IS KNOWN TO BE LESS FAVORABLE TO THE IDEA THAN HE WAS FORMERLY. THE MMM OPPOSITION FAVORS A REPUBLIC WITH A PRESIDENT WITH NO EXECUTIVE POWERS. IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT THE MAURITIAN ELECTORATE WOULD OPT FOR A REPUBLIC IF GIVEN A CHANCE. THE LABOR PARTY PROMISED SUCH A CHANCE IN THE SPEECH FROM THE THRONE LAST JANUARY.

12. INDEPENDENT L'EXPRESS OF AUGUST 19 QUOTED A STATEMENT MADE IN NAGPUR, INDIA ON AUGUST 7 BY DR. SUBRAMANIAM SWAMY, A JANATA DEPUTY, THAT "MAURITIUS' ELECTIONS WERE INFLUENCED BY INDIAN MONEY BY VIOLATING ALL FOREIGN EXCHANGE

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REGULATIONS." THE DEPUTY ALSO REPORTEDLY SAID (ACCORDING TO THE "TIMES OF INDIA") THAT "THE INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS OF THE RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS WING (RAW) HAVING ITS HEAD-QUARTERS IN MAURITIUS WERE FULLY FINANCED BY THE SOVIET UNION." QUESTIONED ABOUT THESE STATEMENTS, THE LABOR PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL, KHER JAGATSINGH, LAUGHED THEM OFF AS "TOTALLY FALSE." HE SAID THAT THE LABOR PARTY HAD PAID FOR ALL THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN MATERIALS OF INDIAN ORIGIN USED LAST SECEMBER. AS FOR THE RAW, JAGATSINGH SAID HE'S NEVER HEARD OF IT. (COMMENT: IT IS FREQUENTLY RUMORED HERE THAT THE LABOR PARTY HAS RECEIVED FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM INDIA IN THE PAST. END COMMENT.)

13. THE MMM CENTRAL COMMITTEE HAS VOTED "UNANIMOUSLY" TO RECOMMEND TO THE ASSEMBLY OF DELEGATES WHICH WILL MEET ON SEPTEMBER 11 THE EXPULSION FROM THE PARTY OF MMM DEPUTY HARRIS RAMPHUL. BERENGER TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE

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THE REASONS WERE RAMPHUL'S "REPEATED INDISCIPLINE," HIS

SYSTEMATIC REFUSAL TO APPEAR BEFORE THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE TO EXPLAIN HIS ATTITUDE, AND HIS RECENT BOYCOTT OF MEETING OF THE MMM PARLIAMENTARY GROUP. (RAMPHUL IS THE BLACK SHEEP OF ONE OF MAURITIUS' WEALTHIER INDIAN FAMILIES CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH THE LABOR PARTY; HIS UNCLE RADHA RAMPHUL IS AMBASSADOR AT THE UN.) RAMPHUL PLANS TO OFFER A MOTION OF CENSURE AGAINST PARTY VICE-PRESIDENT KADER BHAYAT AT THE SEPTEMBER 11 ASSEMBLY OVER THE MANNER IN WHICH MUNICIPAL COUNCIL CANDIDATES WERE CHOSEN, THAT IS, IF HE ISN'T EXPELLED BEFORE HE CAN PRESENT IT. ACCORDING TO THE NATION, RAMPHUL IS PLANNING AN ANTI-MMM PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN ON THE THEME THAT THE MMM IS ANTI-HINDU.

14. MMM "GURU" HERVE MASSON IS REPORTED TO BE PLANNING TO RETURN TO EUROPE, FROM WHENCE HE CAME LAST FALL TO SUPPORT THE PARTY FOR THE GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN. MASSON TOLD THE PRESS HE IS RESIGNING FROM THE MMM CENTRAL COMMITTEE. HE WAS RECENTLY CENSURED BY THAT BODY FOR MAKING CONFIDENTIAL

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STATEMENTS DIVERGING FROM THE "PARTY LINE."

15. A MMM MUNICIPAL COUNCILLOR IN QUATRA BORNES, APPASAWMY, IS RESIGNING FROM THE PARTY. HE TOLD THE PRESS HE WAS INSULTED BY PAUL BERENGER WHEN HE PROTESTED THE LATTER'S ACTION OF PLACING ONE OF HIS PROTEGES ON THE PARTY PAPER AS A POLITICAL PAY-OFF. BERENGER DISPLAYED "BOURGEOIS ARROGANCE," APPASAWMY SAID. HE BLAMED THE LEADERS OF THE MMM, PARTICULARLY BERENGER AND JUGNAUTH, FOR "DUPING" THE PARTY MILITANTS, FOR BEING HYPOCRITES WHO LACK SERIOUSNESS, AND FOR DESTROYING THE PARTY. HE ALSO RESENTS BEING BRUSHED ASIDE AS AN ASSEMBLY CANDIDATE LAST DECEMBER. A CONFIRMED SOCIALIST, HE MAY REJOIN THE LABOR PARTY WHICH HE ABANDONED FOR THE MMM, BUT FOR THE MOMENT HE WILL SIT AS AN INDEPENDENT ON THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL.

16. THE GOVERNMENT TURNED DOWN THE PROPOSAL OF THE PORT LOUIS MUNICIPAL COUNCIL TO USE CREOLE OFFICIALLY IN ITS DELIBERATIONS, BUT THE MMM MAJORITY DECIDED TO USE CREOLE ANYWAY AT THEIR LAST SESSION. THE GOVERNMENT COUNCILLORS INSISTED ON USING ONLY FRENCH AND ENGLISH, WHICH MADE FOR A SORT OF COUNCIL OF BABEL, UNTIL THEY DECIDED TO STAGE A WALKOUT IN PROTEST. THE MMM GROUP CONTINUED THE MEETING, STICKING WITH CREOLE.

17. THE GOVERNMENT HAS EXPLAINED THAT ITS BAN ON IMPORTS OF SECOND-HAND VEHICLES (REFTEL) WAS PRIMARILY CAUSED BY THE INCREASING TRAFFIC CONGESTION ON MAURITIAN ROADS, AND BY THE POOR CONDITION OF THE CARS BEING IMPORTED. IMPORTS OF SECOND-HAND CARS HAD JUMPED BY 60 PERCENT IN THE FIRST

HALF OF THIS YEAR, IT SAID.

18. ACCORDING TO THE HEAD OF AIR MAURITIUS, THE COMPANY
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WILL LEASE A BOEING 707 FROM A BRITISH FIRM TO BEGIN ITS OWN OVERSEAS SERVICE ON OCTOBER 31: A WEEKLY FLIGHT TO LONDON VIA NAIROBI, ANOTHER TO JOHANNESBURG, TWO WEEKLY TO BOMBAY, AND OTHER FLIGHTS TO REUNION ISLAND. THE CREW WILL BE BRITISH BUT THE CABIN PERSONNEL MAURITIAN.

19. THE CONSUMER PRICE INDEX ROSE 1.5 PERCENT IN JULY.
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Message Attributes

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